

Upstate New York – The Finger Lakes Partnership



In the face of increasingly critical economic conditions, leaders within New York State's Finger Lakes region are proposing to link the communities of education, workforce development, and economic development, creating an entrepreneurial, industry-driven, integrated system. The nine county Finger Lakes region is undergoing an historic restructuring. It came to depend on the success of Eastman Kodak, Xerox, and Bausch & Lomb, creating a big-company manufacturing culture that has floundered as technologies changed and global economic shifts left the region in a state of decline. This project is based on a deep commitment to creating fundamental change in the region.

The Finger Lakes Partnership has been designed and will be implemented by a strong team of business, investor, entrepreneurial, philanthropic, government, and academic leaders who share a vision to transform the Finger Lakes region into a premier place in which to innovate, one that invests in entrepreneurial operations and trains workers, empowering them to be agile, adaptable, and aligned with global opportunities. Calling on the expertise of the Partnership founders, Finger Lakes proposes key strategies to support four project goals: 1) energize the region's entrepreneurial economy; 2) catalyze regional innovation; 3) empower workers to succeed in the global economy, and 4) build 21st century innovation infrastructures. This project will result in strategic outcomes closely aligned with DOL's objectives and robust enough to sustain its initiatives for the long-term.

The Finger Lakes region was once among America's most innovative and entrepreneurial. The decline of its large manufacturers in the last two decades is evidenced by increasing poverty and unemployment, decreasing wages, low graduation rates, and sluggish job creation. The area has responded by cultivating technology development organizations and funding services and facilities for start-ups.

Economic analysis, however, highlights an absence of integrated collaboration and sharing of best practices among regional stakeholders; this has created a barrier for transforming the Finger Lakes region into an innovative and entrepreneurial economy. A report by the U. S. Council on Competitiveness for two local organizations reinforced this conclusion: "Greater Rochester has the assets necessary to develop a strong entrepreneurial economy. Indeed, the Rochester area surpasses most regions in the U. S. on many dimensions relevant to supporting innovation and entrepreneurship. However, to date, the region has not become an entrepreneurial success story...A fundamental challenge is cultural – the region lacks a strong entrepreneurial environment."

Continued on back



EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

The 21 members of the Partnership represent critical leadership throughout the Finger Lakes region; strategic leaders from all sectors have endorsed this proposal and are poised to be agents for change in the region. Public/Private entrepreneurial leaders for this project are Greater Rochester Enterprise, High Tech Rochester, Infotronics Technology Center, Rochester Business Alliance, and the Cornell Agriculture and Food Tech Park. The academic community is represented by the region's leading universities, University of Rochester and Rochester Institute of Technology, and three community colleges, Finger Lakes, Monroe, and Genesee. Government partners include the City of Rochester, the County of Monroe, Empire State Development and Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council, which represents eight rural counties and is the planning entity for the New York State-designated Economic Development District. The Rochester WIB, Genesee, Livingston, Orleans, and Wyoming WIB, and the Finger Lakes WIB will connect the initiatives to job seekers, employers and the education systems.

Led by the business community, private and public sectors formed Greater Rochester Enterprise three years ago; the community has shown it is now willing to work together in ways that were not possible a few years ago. This same commitment is evident in this project; the partners that have joined together to increase worker skills are placing an emphasis on the talents of its entrepreneurial community and the sharing of infrastructure, leveraging each other's strengths, all of which will amplify the region's capacity for innovation and build a stronger economy. The investment community is an important partner, represented by the Rochester Angel Network and Trillium Group, a local venture capital firm. Philanthropic support for regional job creation is given by the Rochester Area Community Foundation.

These partners will combine to leverage over \$22 million. The funding will catalyze the region, resulting in a true integration of powerful resources, propelling the economy from a period of slow decline to one of national leadership in regional innovation and entrepreneurship.



EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR